

VZCZCXRO9954
PP RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSL
RUEHSR
DE RUEHAH #1421/01 3091412
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 051412Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3709
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5854
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3562
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3421
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4096
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4058
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1232
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001421

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; MED

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2019

TAGS: [AMED](#) [KFLU](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: GOVERNMENT IN DENIAL ABOUT PRESENCE
OF FLU

REF: ASHGABAT 1404

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) a
nd (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Embassy officers estimate that the number of deaths in Turkmenistan has risen sharply since mid-October, but the Turkmen Government denies that there is H1N1 in the country. The government has reportedly given instructions that people are not allowed to wear masks and pharmacies are no longer selling preventive remedies. The lack of public information about the flu is another counterproductive Turkmen policy that will probably spread panic, instead of preventing it. However, the government is probably loathe to show there is any health problem here, on the eve of hosting an international oil and gas conference. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Embassy Ashgabat has attempted to gather information about how many Turkmen have died from the flu. UNICEF and the Turkish Embassy both provided estimates (reftel) of 20-30 deaths, but this figure appears low. Many Embassy employees know of someone who has died, indicating that the number of deaths is much higher. One local Embassy employee heard from a relative who works at the Ministry of Health that, internally, Ministry officials discuss 200 deaths caused by the flu in Turkmenistan. However, the Ministry has reportedly told the World Health Organization that the number is 50-60. No data has been publicly released.

¶3. (C) On November 4, Embassy officers visited the Russian Orthodox and Muslim cemeteries in Choganly, on the northern edge of Ashgabat. It was apparent that the number of deaths has risen sharply since mid-October. There were approximately 150 graves from the second half of October. Eight deaths occurred on October 18 alone. Although there were a handful of graves of children and young adults, the majority of graves were for persons age 60 and older. A Russian Orthodox priest who was at the graveyard admitted to Embassy officers that they are burying many people, but explained that "more people die in the spring and the fall

because of the changing atmospheric pressure."

¶4. (SBU) An article published in the state-run newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan on November 4 stated that there is "not one case of H1N1 on the territory of Turkmenistan." The article further explained that, while the country has already purchased "the appropriate vaccine in the necessary quantity," since not a single case of H1N1 has appeared in Turkmenistan, "there is no need to conduct a mass vaccination of the population." Airport personnel are described as taking arriving passengers' temperatures and have found no cases of H1N1 among people entering the country. However, Embassy officers who flew into Ashgabat on November 1 say they did not encounter any monitoring. According to UNICEF the Turkmenistan government has approached WHO to obtain 350,000 doses of vaccine for seasonal flu.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy officers have heard from local contacts that the government instructed people to stop wearing masks. There were no salespeople at the Russian bazaar on November 4 wearing masks, and on November 4-5 only three or four schoolchildren were seen on the street wearing masks. There were a handful of customers at both the Russian market and the Turkish-run shopping center wearing masks, however.

¶6. (SBU) There are reports of doctors refusing to treat sick individuals. One local UN employee told us that the director of School #16 in ashgabat forbid children from wearing masks at school. The administration of School #7 told parents that their children had to come to school no matter how high their temperature may be.

ASHGABAT 00001421 002 OF 002

¶7. (SBU) Pharmacies were still busy on November 4, even though they were sold out of preventive remedies. No pharmacies had Oksolin ointment, which locals believe prevents colds and flu if applied to the nose. Poloff found only one pharmacy out of the four visited that was selling face masks, although a local Embassy employee said that he was in a pharmacy that had masks behind the counter, but was not selling them to customers.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The Turkmen Government could mitigate the impact of the flu outbreak by giving its population accurate information about the symptoms and how to protect oneself. It seemed to be taking that path when on November 2 it published an article about how people could stave off respiratory diseases. The subsequent pronouncement that there is no H1N1 in Turkmenistan indicates that the government will not take appropriate public health measures to counter the outbreak. It is likely that the government does not want to indicate there are problems here two weeks prefer hosting an international oil and gas conference. This approach, however, leaves the public on its own to manage the best it can, although widespread misinformation and inadequate remedies provide it with few resources. END COMMENT.
CURRAN